A LETTER TO A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

[Price ONE SHILLING and SIXPENCE.]

46
1 9
247

A LETTER TO A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

SIR,

THE profound reſpect which ought to be entertained for the repreſentatives of a nation, would fix the charge of preſumption upon an addreſs like this, if made to them in their legiſlative capacity; but is far from precluding a communication of my thoughts to you, as an individual member of that collective body. Though not a native of France, believe me, Sir, I rejoice at the emancipation of its people, and have accompanied, with earneſt ſolicitude, their labour in raiſing a monument of liberty, which deſerves the admiration of the world. There is

a ridiculous notion that the inhabitants of one country have no concern in the internal tranſactions of another; but *Freedom* ſhould ſpeak an *univerſal language*, and every rational being ſhould think and act upon thoſe principles of government, the truth, dignity, and utility of which are diſcovered with irreſiſtible conviction to the enquiring mind. The inſidious enemies to liberty have accuſed your patriots of raſhly overturning, inſtead of cautiouſly reforming, the ſyſtem that they have exploded; but was not that ſyſtem too corrupt and obnoxious to require a *ſtrict* examination? Yes, it was a peſtilence in which every noble emotion of the heart—every vital ſenſation of liberty, were likely to be deſtroyed; tyranny and peculation, with united and baneful influence, had long impoveriſhed, and held in the moſt diſgraceful bondage, a delightful and fertile country, celebrated for the genius and valour of its numerous people.

Whoever conſiders this, cannot wonder that a *Revolution* ſhould have taken place in France; but muſt feel ſurprize that it did not happen *before*: but, thank heaven, the great event is

accompliſhed, Frenchmen have awakened from the dream of ignoble ſlavery; deſpotiſm has glided away like a phantom; and the mingled, the gaudy wreath of power and flattery, has withered and fallen from its brow.

The treatment of your monarch, after the Revolution, has been variouſly repreſented; the pampered, the intriguing, and routed minions of a diſſolute court, have preſumed to talk of his *misfortunes*, and to cenſure your aſſembly, as having reduced their king to a nonentity; the *truth* is, that he has indeed *loſt* much, but purely in proportion as he poſſeſſed *too much*. In forming a new conſtitution, you did not deſtroy his prerogative, but only extracted the ſting—you gave him every power calculated for the benefit, though none that he could employ to the injury of the ſtate; like frugal directors of the public treaſure, you abridged his enormous allowances *, but left enough to ſupport the true and amiable ſplendour of royalty.

After

* Immenſe revenues, granted to kings, have many pernicious tendencies: they grievouſly oppreſs the people, and frequently undermine their liberties; they produce flagrant

After the National Aſſembly had thus reſtored the *people*, without ſuppreſſing the *king*—and after the latter had repeatedly, and moſt ſolemnly avowed his entire approbation of the new ſyſtem, it was reaſonable to ſuppoſe that he would endeavour to deſerve the confidence of his ſubjects, by refuſing to countenance the factious intrigues of thoſe, who were endeavouring to make him a tool of their ambition, and a procurator for their extravagance; but truth reluctantly confeſſes, that this belief was unfounded, and that the profeſſing Louis has attempted to deſert his people! Notwithſtanding the declarations which have been tranſmitted to the Aſſembly, there can be no difficulty in perceiving the influence that muſt have dictated this alarming and treacherous meaſure: it cannot be imputed to the king. You know his majeſty's diſpoſition: *policy* and *enterprize* are not its ſtriking characteriſtics: he has certainly been miſled, and if unaſſailed by the emiſſaries of pride and rebellion,

diſſipation, or deſpicable avarice; the laſt is a *common* circumſtance, and when the practice of inferior public magiſtrates, is leſs obnoxious; but, as all the branches of the family of a *King* are ſure to obtain an ample and honourable proviſion, ought he to harbour a thought of acquiring *private* wealth?

would

would doubtleſs have fulfilled his profeſſions of attachment, to the freedom and tranquillity of France. Fear alſo may have had ſome ſhare in producing the recent flight: had your Aſſembly reſolutely employed its authority in quelling the popular tumult, when his Majeſty was deſirous to viſit St. Cloud, he would not have imbibed thoſe ſuſpicions of his perſonal ſafety, which evil ſuggeſtions have ſo artfully increaſed for the purpoſe of urging him to an attempt that has expoſed him to the diſgrace of being arreſted by his people, and of making the weak, the improbable, and pitiable excuſe, that he did not mean to exceed the limits of his kingdom. Though in this inſtance, I impute a want of reſolution to the members of your Aſſembly, yet I believe they acted from the beſt motives: they were no doubt apprehenſive that violence would be offered to the king: the apprehenſion did honour to their feelings, and evinced their regard for the royal perſon. Permit me, however, to obſerve, that your new conſtitution cannot exiſt, if you ſuffer the people to controul the legiſlative power; and that by neglecting, at that time, to inſiſt that the common privilege of a ſubject ſhould be enjoyed by the king, he, perhaps, miſconſtrued

miſconſtrued your intentions, and felt his confidence weakened. As the confinement of one man, however exalted in rank, is but a ſmall ſacrifice to preſerve the peace of a nation, and the lives of its inhabitants, your Aſſembly is now wiſe in appointing the reſidence of the king. He is conſidered by many as having virtually forſaken the new conſtitution: this charge he has denied, and is therefore ſtill an exiſting part of that conſtitution. However ſuſpicious his flight may appear, it has been productive of one deſirable conſequence; it has pointedly told him a truth, which before he had perhaps been perſuaded to doubt; for flattery and falſehood are ever pouring their inſinuations into the ears of princes. There are many circumſtances that palliate the probable influence of ſuch inſinuations on the king; conſider that he was almoſt *born* a monarch, and did not *make* the government to which he ſucceeded; reflect that he *has* reigned in the plenitude of regal power; and diſtinguiſh from the crafty and cruel tyrant, the credulous, the deceived, and imprudent ſucceſſor to hereditary deſpotiſm.

The character of the National Aſſembly depends upon its proceedings at this important criſis;

criſis; and I am happy to obſerve a ſpecimen of reſpectful delicacy in the appointment of commiſſioners to receive the declarations of the king and queen. Popular diſlike has long been particularly pointed at the latter; a great part of the diſcontent that preceded the Revolution, and of the oppoſition which it has ſince experienced, are aſcribed to her machinations: the point is *very delicate*; you are to judge for yourſelves. I have no documents to offer in defence of the royal lady in queſtion; but I hope that report has exaggerated. Should the contrary be true, let not unmanly reſentment expoſe you to ridicule. There is indeed at the ruder period of your hiſtory an example of puniſhment inflicted upon a queen *, but for crimes more atrocious than *could* be committed in the preſent civilized ſtate of the world; and however deſervingly they were puniſhed, the levities, the paltry and ineffectual cabals of a modern queen, may be pitied

* Brunechild. The character of this princeſs reſembled that of the famed Semiramis; her public works were magnificent, but her reign exhibited a ſcene of the moſt wanton licentiouſneſs, and ſhocking cruelty: ſhe is ſaid to have murdered ten kings! after being publickly accuſed by Clotarius II. ſhe was put upon a camel, led through the army, as an ignominious ſpectacle, and then beheaded on a ſcaffold.

and

and forgiven, as the reſult of female weakneſs, perverted from the ſight of its true intereſt, by the dazzling glare of falſe ambition.

The confidence of the people in the rectitude and patriotiſm of their legiſlators, conſpicuouſly appeared in the behaviour obſerved on the arreſtation of the king, which was effected by the moſt orderly vigilance, and in which moderation and judgment were equally and happily blended with a zealous attachment to the new conſtitution. That you will continue to deſerve this confidence, I make no doubt, for appearances are much in your favour. Your declared ſentiments with reſpect to the Dauphine, and the diſintereſted determination, not to chuſe him a governor from among yourſelves, afford a ſtrong preſumption that you have no intention to eſtabliſh democracy—which though *ſpeculatively* the *beſt*, is *practically* the *worſt* form of government. The democratic ſtates of Greece were involved in the tumults of perpetual diſcord; jealouſies * and fears excluded the greateſt characters

* The oſtraciſm, or baniſhment, by which the Athenians expreſt their apprehenſions of any citizen who had acquired great

characters from the public ſervice, or violent competition cauſed it to be fatally delayed. The people did every thing: they were guided by their paſſions, and for want of a moderating influence, the pride, the glory of Athens, its *liberty*, was deſtroyed by the exceſſive attrition of its own ſprings. Sparta, though it by no means exhibited a proper model † of government, yet by ſurviving Athens afforded a proof of the utility of an executive power. Rome, after ſhaking off, in the reign of Tarquin, the yoke laid on by its founder, nearly approximated to a vigorous and flouriſhing democracy; but though more united than Greece, its public affairs could not be conducted without the aſſiſt-

great power in the commonwealth, was perverted by the popular intrigues of different parties, and at laſt diſcontinued, through the contempt of its having fallen on a low and inſolent man named Hyperbolus.

† Perhaps no government was ever ſo paradoxical as that of Sparta: it had a monarchy doubly repreſented, and yet under the controul of an abſolute oligarchy; its people were temperate without virtue, and rigid without honeſty; they fought, not with the enthuſiaſm of courage, but from a ſevere inflexibility of habit; and their boaſted freedom was a compoſition of pride and auſterity, erected on the baſis of political and domeſtic tyranny.

ance of officers, who from the power of their functions might be denominated temporary kings: to the want of a permanent portion of this monarchical power, we may attribute the loſs of the liberty of Rome; diſpirited, enfeebled, exhauſted by the deſtructive conteſts of aſpiring individuals, ſhe repoſed for peace in the arms of deſpotiſm, and was glad to ſubmit to one uſurper, that ſhe might be protected againſt the violence of another. With reſpect to modern republics, the opinion is equally applicable; they muſt relinquiſh their dignity, their generoſity, their virtue, or part with their freedom, I ſhould ſay with their *form* of government; for they are *ſubject* to the moſt ſlaviſh fears. Geneva may be mentioned as an inſtance of exception; but Geneva poſſeſſes only the *form*, not the *importance* of a republic. The maritime ſituation of Venice gives it a peculiar degree of importance; yet who can behold the miſerable jealouſies, and petty ſtratagems of that republic, without pitying or deſpiſing the means of its exiſtence? The more I beſtow conſideration upon this ſubject, the more I am convinced of the happy influence and ſuperior efficacy of that ſpecies of monarchy which is adopted by the conſtitution of England, and which

which the States of Holland have feebly imitated, by creating the office of Stadtholder.

Though I have paid a juſt tribute to the Engliſh conſtitution, it would be abſurd to maintain an unqualified aſſertion of its excellence; there are many excreſcences that cling to the oak of Britiſh liberty, and are nouriſhed by its ſap. You muſt be conſcious that they conſume what would give additional vigour to the fruitful branches: I cannot therefore gravely tell you they ſhould be cheriſhed *becauſe they are excreſcences*; notwithſtanding I have the example of a celebrated writer.* Equality of repreſentation is to any people the moſt valuable token of liberty, and in this eſſential ingredient is the boaſted parliament of England miſerably deficient. A bad ſyſtem of repreſentation muſt conſequently be attended with increaſing miſchief in its effects; and it is impoſſible to conceal the diſgraceful venality by which our elections are contaminated: for this offence you have decreed the puniſhment of death; it is a puniſhment great and awful, but by no means

* Mr. Burke, who unintelligibly ſays that we cheriſh our prejudices becauſe they are prejudices!

too ſevere for the crime to which it is applied. The *liberty brokers* of England may affect ſurpriſe, but the *frequency* of corruption cannot leſſen its *enormity*. Such is the legiſlative deficiency of the Britiſh government: in organizing the new conſtitution of France, the National Aſſembly have wiſely avoided the errors of other ſyſtems; but while theſe abuſes remain among us without redreſs, we can think little better of our modern parliaments than of thoſe which ſubmitted to the imperious tyranny of the line of Tudor, or the ſlaviſh dogmas of the houſe of Stuart. The total ſuppreſſion of titles of nobility in your country, naturally invites me to make a few remarks upon the circumſtance, which, in my opinion, rather betrays the impetuoſity of *zeal*, than the judgment of *deliberation*. You ſay that you have removed all invidious diſtinctions between man and man; but let me aſk if men have not different degrees of public merit? You reply yes; and men of public merit are rewarded by public approbation. Let me again aſk what is the applauſe of the people but a ſort of title? a title, which as a reward is incomplete, becauſe it may be recalled at a ſubſequent period by a capricious review of the beſt actions. You will perhaps be ready to ſmile at

my concern for preſerving that rank, the inſignia of which have been ſo broadly ridiculed by the author of "The Rights of Man;" but notwithſtanding my reſpect for the ſtrong ſenſe of that ingenious writer, I cannot allow that ſtars and ribbons are the contemptible playthings he deſcribes them to be: when *we* behold them, it is not with ſuch an idea; they are portraits emblematical of learning, of diligence, and virtue; they are hiſtorical pictures that repreſent the atchievements of military heroiſm, or the ſplendor of political talents; they are tokens of memorable ſervice performed in the cabinet, or field; they have been worn by a Bacon, a Marlborough, a Chatham, and an Heathfield. Having now done with my rhapſody, I haſten to expreſs my approbation of a decree, by which the National Aſſembly has diſarmed the kingly prerogative of its moſt dangerous power, that of declaring war: the poſſeſſion of this power by monarchs, and their frequency of employing it from the motives of ambition or revenge, have largely contributed to the untimely deſtruction of the human ſpecies. Thus far philoſophy; and in politicks no propoſition can be more evidently abſurd than that which ſtates the *right* of a king to diſpoſe of the lives

and

and treaſure of his ſubjects without their conſent; or in a cauſe concerning the juſtice of which they are not completely ſatisfied. How ſtrongly inimical this power is to the welfare of a ſtate, when placed in ſuch hands, appears from innumerable inſtances; we have felt its ſevereſt conſequences, we have been almoſt ruined by a war againſt freedom, a war deteſted by the people, ſupported by ſullen obſtinacy, and terminating in diſgrace.

When the luxury or indolence of a monarch has kept him from wiſhing to provoke the horrors of war, the intrigues and miſrepreſentations of a miniſter have not unfrequently ſupplied the deficiency; by this influence, cauſes the moſt trivial and ridiculous (though very ſerious in their effects) have been productive of hoſtile meaſures: and we are told that France was once involved in a war, becauſe the king found fault with a window* of his palace! In every ſyſtem of go-

* A well known anecdote reports that the miniſter Louvois, interpreted this circumſtance, as an indication of *troubleſome* curioſity, and immediately determined to divert the attention of his maſter, by a war.

vernment

vernment where the king poſſeſſes this power, it is very liable to be imprudently and dangerouſly exerciſed. The form of our conſtitution has given the Houſe of Commons an opportunity of ſtopping the miſchief that may ſpring from that fource by a refuſal of ſupplies. The oppoſition that can be made by the people to any obnoxious meaſures of the crown, ſolely conſiſts in the uſe of this ſalutary reſtriction; and when we conſider that it may be intirely deprived of its force, by a corrupt majority, we muſt be particularly convinced of the neceſſity of a parliamentary reform, and then of placing the power alluded to in the repreſentatives of the people, who would be moſt capable of perceiving the expedience of a war, and beſt acquainted with the reſources for carrying it on.

I do not much wonder at the oppoſition made by a part of the clergy to the forms of your new conſtitution: eccleſiaſtical prejudices are the moſt difficult of any to be eradicated, or one would think that in the eighteenth century men were not ſo conſcience-bound as to admit a thought of the Pope into their temporal or ſpiritual concerns. There are, no doubt, other and

ſtronger

ſtronger motives for the conduct of the diſaffected biſhops. You have been violently accuſed of ſeizing upon the property of the church, and of applying it to the moſt profane uſes. The truth is, you have retrenched the bloated exuberance of epiſcopal pride, for the purpoſe of decently ſuſtaining the leſs fortunate, but more uſeful * members of the clergy. This is the profanation with which you are charged: be vigilant, for you cannot have to deal with enemies more tenacious, more ſubtle, more revengeful.

That his holineſs the pope ſhould expreſs his diſapprobation of the new government, is not extraordinary; he is *feelingly* alarmed on the occaſion. Superſtition has long been gradually withdrawing her ſupplies; and the power that could once extend over Europe, the ſcourge of myſtic terror, is now but a painted ſhadow that

* A better example could not be ſet for the imitation of England: the diſtreſſes of our inferior clergy are well known, and reflect diſcredit upon the nation. A moderate deduction from the great incomes of ſome biſhoprics and benefices, would reſcue many miniſters of piety and learning from the dreadful fangs of poverty.

impotently

impotently threatens to obſtruct the progreſs of liberty. You have done right in excluding from the body of *national* clergy, thoſe who refuſe to take the conſtitutional oath. Religion has for too many ages been ſuffered to interfere with politics, and hiſtory abounds with examples of the miſchief that has attended the interference; the ſtate has long borne the church, like a ſickly brother, on its back; has humoured its peeviſhneſs, and indulged its intolerant whims: for this the ſtate has met with no return but ingratitude; it has been diſtracted by plots and cabals, from the very object of its indulgence and protection. This is my opinion concerning religious eſtabliſhments excluſively ſupported, and poſſeſſing any degree of political power: experience has proved that an irritated eſtabliſhment cannot quench the fire of its anger but in a river of human blood; the maſſacres of St. Bartholomew and Ireland, the cruelties of the Spaniſh inquiſition, and the perſecution of the Lollards in England, are not to be forgotten: nor are catholic eſtabliſhments alone to be cenſured for ſporting with the lives of men. Intolerancy is always the ſame; it is a terrible monſter,

whether let looſe by the catholic tyranny of a Mary, or the proteſtant bigotry of an Elizabeth.

An eſtabliſhment you indeed retain, but it is one that perfectly accords with the liberal plan of the new conſtitution; and that happily poſſeſſes not the power of directing or impeding the operations of the ſtate.

If any country, therefore, is likely to obtain the ſervice of great men, it is France: the National Aſſembly requires a ſolemn declaration of attachment to the welfare of the new government, but diſowns the obnoxious tenet of preſcribing certain articles of *religious* belief to individuals as a teſt of their *public* fidelity. The brief lately addreſſed by the pope to the biſhop of Sens, and the ſpirited anſwer which was written by the patriotic prelate, ſhews the opinion that enlightened eccleſiaſtics entertain of papal influence; and the preſent government of France, though it nobly diſcaims a juriſdiction over the conſcience, is (at this period) prudent in conſidering thoſe as its enemies, who prefer the

viſionary ſupremacy of the pope, to the ſolid happineſs of their country.

The Revolution in your kingdom has occaſioned much ſpeculation in ours; and I cannot avoid taking notice of the productions of the two principal antagoniſts on the ſubject, Mr. BURKE and Mr. PAINE. It is the duty of an Engliſhman, while he reveres that conſtitution which pronounces him a ſon of liberty, to rejoice at any change by which the invaluable advantages of freedom are communicated to another people: from this duty Mr. BURKE has widely deviated; he has praiſed the Engliſh conſtitution, but not in the language of liberty—he has ſtigmatized the French Revolution, but from no other viſible motives, than thoſe of prejudice, petulance, and miſrepreſentation.

When I conſider the literary character and reputed wiſdom of Mr. BURKE, before the publication of his unfortunate book, I am unwilling to believe him the author of ſentiments that bear ſo inconteſtibly the marks of political dotage; but the moſt candid peruſal

of his letter on the affairs of France, cannot ſuggeſt a more favourable opinion. Mr. BURKE has been dignified by the title of philoſopher; the application of this term is very looſe and indefinite: there are ſome philoſophers, (and Mr. BURKE now appears to be one of the number) who, to obtain applauſe, are fond of exalting liberty in the abſtract; but when it is improved from a *principle* into an *exiſtence*; when it is worſhipped as a living deity, and the joyful ſhouts of an adoring people diſturb the repoſe of lazy ſpeculation, theſe *verſatile* * philoſophers iſſue forth to decry the unexpected ceremony: with affected horror they call it idolatrous, and haſtily recant from the doctrines they formerly profeſſed to believe, but which they never ſincerely intended to vindicate. Mr. BURKE's performance was expected with much curioſity by the literary world, not as a book that could have any proſpect

* In what other way can we account for the ſpeeches delivered by Mr. BURKE on ſeveral parliamentary queſtions; and for the Abbè Raynal's late deſertion of the ſentiments in favour of liberty, which are ſo plentifully ſcattered in his writings?

of

† Extracted by the Monthly Rev. Dec. 1791

of ſucceſs in its avowed deſign of oppoſing the French Revolution; but as one that would at leaſt contain more plauſibility and ingenuity than the work of any other champion in the ſame cauſe. With how much diſappointment the pamphlet was read, it is by this time ſcarcely neceſſary to ſtate, for the fact has got into general circulation. Inſtead of that ingenious and plauſible vindication of tyranny, which was expected by many, there appeared a confuſed heap of notions about compact, deſcent, and prerogative, that have been long ago condemned at the bar of common ſenſe. With ſuch little appearance of argument does Mr. BURKE qualify his opinions, that we can ſcarcely preſerve our patience, when we are told that any portion of mankind are not entitled to their natural and civil rights, if certain compacts have been made by their anceſtors, however glaringly thoſe compacts may betray the ſigns of inconſiderate folly, or ſlaviſh weakneſs.

That men, in conforming to the order of civil government, muſt neceſſarily relinquiſh many rights, is true; but they are rights fit only

only for the unſocial ſtate of ſavage life. Some of them are rendered unneceſſary by the protection we obtain from ſociety; and others become unjuſt by the encouragement which it affords to induſtry: theſe are the only rights we abſolutely relinquiſh, and that for the purpoſe of giving energy to the operations of a ſocial compact; but the privilege of making the government, which may have reſulted from that compact, ſubſervient to our happineſs, we ſtill undoubtedly retain.

This right, the moſt arrogant dogmatiſm and cunning ſophiſtry cannot invalidate; it is acknowledged by every author who has written rationally upon government; it may be diſcriminated from the ſarcaſtic deiſm of Voltaire, and the romantic fervour of Rouſſeau; it beams with concentrated warmth in the bold effuſions of Locke, and plays with diffuſive light among the cautious elucidations of Blackſtone. The validity of ſuch a right being indiſputable, the queſtion is, when ought it to be exerciſed? Here we come to a teſt of principles; every *trivial* diſorder of the

the ſtate does not need a *conſultation* of phyſicians—nor ſhould the diſaffection of a few factious individuals be permitted to overturn any ſyſtem of government. This is the argument upon which Mr. BURKE principally relies; but though ſtrictly true in itſelf, his application of it to the French Revolution is palpably falſe. When the chord of ſympathy vibrates through a whole kingdom;—when millions of people *feel* and *aſſert* the neceſſity of altering an oppreſſive mode of government; is their generous ardour to be degraded into the diſcontent of a private cabal; or can the invectives of Mr. BURKE be thought to proceed from a philoſopher and a man?

Fancy, heated by anger, generally produces the moſt hideous exaggeration; and to this cauſe we may trace the ſanguinary epithets by which Mr. BURKE has deſcribed the progreſs of the French Revolution: he has made no *regular* ſtatement of facts, nor has he *candidly* inveſtigated the cauſes that produced them; he has invoked the machinery of horror to his aſſiſtance: every period has its lamp-poſt, around

around which axes, halters, ruffians, and victims dance with a grand ſtage effect of ſlaughter and confuſion. One of the moſt elegant abſurdities in Mr. BURKE's pamphlet, is the paſſage where he exclaims with pompous ſorrow that "the age of chivalry is no more." In the whole of this encomium on the French queen, he diſplays a warm imagination, and peculiar brilliancy of language; but words merely harmonious, can have no magical effect. The age of gallic *ſlavery* is no more; nor can all the muſic of this political Amphion rebuild the walls of the Baſtille.

It is a favourite theme with Mr. BURKE to lament over *fallen* and *inſulted* majeſty; and to complain that every ſpark of that enthuſiaſm with which gallant Frenchmen have always regarded their king, is extinguiſhed in a deluge of ſedition: a recent fact * that occurred

* During the deliberations of the National Aſſembly, after the attempt of the king to eſcape, M. de Bonnay, an officer of the guards, declared from his ſeat, "That though as an *adviſer* he would certainly have diſapproved the flight of his majeſty; yet as an *officer*, had his attendance

occurred within the walls of your aſſembly will, it is to be hoped, convince him of his miſtake; and when we ſurvey the conduct of the people at large, from the beginning of the Revolution to the preſent time, they appear to have been actuated by a very high degree of reſpect for the perſon of the ſovereign: they did not indeed ſuffer that reſpect to overcome the neceſſity of a Reformation in the State, but after the Revolution was happily accompliſhed, the gratitude of the nation knew how to value the apparently chearful compliance of the king; every tongue uttered the acclamation of "*Vive le Roi.*" Louis was hailed as the friend, the ſaviour of his people; and not till the moſt ſuſpicious tokens of inſincerity appeared, did the latter alter this opinion of their chief magiſtrate. The truth of the popular ſuſpicion that the king was receding from his profeſſions, is now very

attendance been commanded, he ſhould have thought it his duty to obey, and to expoſe his life in defence of his royal maſter." Surely this brave and generous confeſſion may be regarded as a proof that the French Revolution has *not* extinguiſhed that ſpirit of military honour which produces a perſonal attachment to the ſovereign.

plain. The people at preſent ſeem to feel contempt rather than anger; but let their behaviour be what it may, it will not juſtify the previous miſrepreſentation of Mr. BURKE.

A full and maſterly refutation of Mr. BURKE's attack on the French Revolution, has appeared in Mr. PAINE's "Rights of Man." In making theſe remarks, I am but a dwarf following a giant; yet I was anxious to aſſure you, that Mr. BURKE's production, ſo far from anſwering the purpoſe for which it was intended, has had an entirely contrary effect, by producing a general recognition of thoſe unalienable rights, the exiſtence of which it imprudently and weakly queſtions. The virulence with which Mr. BURKE has abuſed the members of your National Aſſembly, and ſome of the moſt reſpectable characters in England, is aſtoniſhing; but our people are aſhamed of his illiberality. In publiſhing his opinions, and abuſe, he has injured nothing but the cauſe he ſtood forth to defend; for though his literary talents are admired, his political doctrines are treated with the contempt they deſerve.

But the reflections of Mr. BURKE are not to be diſmiſſed without an acknowledgment of the infinite obligation they have conferred upon the world, by making way for the introduction of Mr. PAINE's "Rights of Man," a book which recommends the pureſt principles, though not the moſt eligible form of government. After being diſguſted by tortured facts, illiberal concluſions, and flimſy rhetoric, we muſt look into *this* performance for authentic information, conveyed in a manly energy of ſtyle. The opportunities which the connections of the author have afforded him of being acquainted with French affairs, throw conſiderable light upon the buſineſs of the Revolution, and enable us to ſee through a maſs of miſrepreſentation; all the circumſtances connected with that great event, are narrated with honeſt perſpicuity in Mr. PAINE's book, and illuſtrated by remarks that diſplay an uncommon ſtrength of mind. It would have been impoſſible for Mr. BURKE to have met with a more formidable opponent, than the author of the "Rights of Man"—who wiſely aſcribes the change in the government of France, to a revolution

of ſentiment among the people, and not *merely* to a diſlike of the meaſures then purſued by the court.

Much credit is due to Mr. PAINE in every particular of what he advances to juſtify the *French* Revolution; but the ſportive ridicule he beſtows on *that* which introduced the preſent reigning family to the throne of England, is unſupported by the authority of a ſingle ſerious argument. The convention which aſſembled at the period of 1688, for the purpoſe of ſettling the government, was as complete a repreſentation of the people as could be obtained, without an irreparable injury to the peace of the community: it was a recurrence to the firſt principles of government, but calculated expeditiouſly to remove a temporary impediment in the machine, inſtead of breaking it to pieces with unneceſſary violence. The ſituation of France, before the late Revolution, will not admit of any compariſon with that of England at the time of the Abdication: France had long endured a grievous oppreſſion, ſyſtematically unavoidable under its form of government; a *very material*

terial change was therefore neceſſary in that ſyſtem.

England, when its throne was forfeited by the miſconduct of James, was a country familiar with freedom; it had wreſted with a noble ſpirit its proper, though till then unclaimed rights, from the unwilling hand of Charles the firſt, and inflicted upon that unfortunate example of ſuperſtitious tyranny, the puniſhment of a king who rebelled againſt a people. Thus the late Revolution in France was a complete rejection of a long-eſtabliſhed mode of government *founded* upon tyrannic principles; and that which took place in England a century paſt, was the oppoſition of a *free* people to the meaſures of a man who was labouring to *introduce* tyranny. This is the difference between the predicaments of the two nations; and the aſſertion of Mr. PAINE that England has no conſtitution, is now to be examined.

The Saxon tribes who were invited to protect, but who nearly exterminated the ancient inhabitants of Britain, were the firſt among

among the Germans who ſubmitted to regal authority. Having ſubdued a numerous people, and acquired a rich country, they had no longer the incitements which, before this conqueſt, led them forth to plunder; and though their valour was not then degenerated, they exchanged the irregular power of their chiefs, for a kind of government under which they might regularly and ſecurely enjoy their new acquiſitions. In the kingdoms of the heptarchy, hereditary ſucceſſion was commonly obſerved, till the union under Egbert eſtabliſhed a ſingle and complete monarchy in the iſland. This form of government appears to have been agreeable to a majority of the people; and the Saxon line produced many princes of wiſdom and valour, before the ſucceſſion was interrupted by Canute, and in the interval between the Daniſh conqueſt and the memorable invaſion by William of Normandy. From this inflexible conqueror, our anceſtors, the Saxons, experienced in their turn the ſeverities they had formerly inflicted: the kind of monarchy to which they had aſſented was thrown aſide: they were compelled to ſubmit to a king who deſpotically exerciſed

exerciſed unlimited power, and who deprived them of their poſſeſſions by the tranſplanted rigours of the feudal ſyſtem.

Mr. PAINE alludes to this conqueſt as a diſgrace to Britain: what peculiar diſgrace is to be attributed to England on account of the Norman conqueſt, I cannot conceive. Conqueſt is an accident, which, as it ariſes from a competition of ſtrength, and the reſtleſs temper of mankind, has perpetually happened to one community or other in the uncivilized ages of the world; and what the Saxons had by violence taken from the antient Britons, they were obliged to relinquiſh to a ſtronger band of invaders from Normandy. During the oppreſſive exiſtence of the feudal ſyſtem, the reign of ſuperſtition, and the cloſe connection of a proud and vindictive clergy with the crown, but a ſmall portion of liberty was enjoyed by the people of England: arbitrary power was an effect that naturally continued to reſult from theſe combined cauſes, till the fortunate imprudence of John threw away its firmeſt props, by driving the offended Barons and clergy, to aſſociate with the people, whom

whom they inſtructed to comprehend, and aſſiſted to obtain, the privileges that form the baſis of Engliſh freedom. This is an event in our hiſtory that nearly correſponds with your Revolution; a declaration of rights was made and confirmed, and the form of government thereby conſiderably altered; for John had only filled up with more glaring colours of tyranny, the outlines of the prerogatives tranſmitted by his predeceſſors.* The frequent and violent infringements that were made upon Magna Charta by Henry III. led the way to a more effectual ſecurity for the rights of the people, and a firmer eſtabliſhment of their importance, by repreſentation in a Houſe of Commons. Till this period the people, who poſſeſſed no power but what they derived from the capricious friendſhip of the barons, had been unable to procure a full performance of the conditions ſtipulated in their favour by the great charter: monarchy and ariſtocracy had alternately held, with rude

* It is not meant to inſinuate a compariſon between the cruelty and perfidious atrocity of the Engliſh tyrant, and the good-natured paſſive epicuriſm of the French k—g.

and

and unſteady hands, the delicate balance of government; but the conſtitution was at laſt completed by the addition of a democratic influence, that was neceſſary to limit the power of the crown, and to curb the inſupportable tyranny of the Barons, by relaxing the rigid features of the feudal ſyſtem. Thus we may pronounce (without quibbling about the derivation of a term) that a number of accidental circumſtances have given to England a conſtitution, as beautiful in its parts, and ſyſtematically regular in the whole, as could have been produced by the brighteſt efforts of fœderative wiſdom.

The tyrannic behaviour of many princes who reigned after the eſtabliſhment of the houſe of commons, though it ſuppreſſed the energy, did not deſtroy the form of the conſtitution; and as ideas of liberty increaſe in proportion with the ſtrength of human reaſon, the innovations of ſubſequent monarchs were ſucceſsfully repelled; and the convention in 1688, in ſettling the limits of each department in the ſtate, left no improper right within the prerogative of the crown, except that of de-

claring war. A transfer of this right, and an equal repreſentation of the people, are the only improvements neceſſary to give perfect energy to the Engliſh conſtitution: its form is admirable, and ſhould remain ſacred from any attempts at alteration. It is eaſier to deſtroy than build; nor ſhould a noble edifice be conſumed, becauſe a few vermin have made it their ſhelter.

In expreſſing theſe ſentiments, upon the ſubject of the Engliſh conſtitution, I feel the pleaſure that every citizen ought to feel at the emancipation of France from the fetters of deſpotiſm; but I thought it my duty, and it was my wiſh to maintain, that no inference can be drawn from the circumſtance collectively, that is juſtly applicable to the Britiſh government; the defects of which are not radical, and therefore have no occaſion for ſo violent a remedy.

Concerning ſtates purely democratical, I have told you my opinion: democracy, though the moſt eſſential part, is ſtill but the baſe of the pillar of government; monarchy and ariſtocracy have their advantages, and an admirable

ſtructure is made by uniting the three. Thus would I recommend a conſtitution in form like that of England to the ſerious attention of France: a limited monarchy contains the wiſeſt principles of government that are reducible to practice; it admits the people to an ample ſhare of power, while a body of nobility leſſens the immenſe diſtance, at which the ſplendour of the higheſt rank ſeems to place a king from the loweſt of his ſubjects.

This diſtance you have increaſed by an abolition of titles; the deſign was good, but the effect may be miſchievous: it is a dreadful chaſm between the people and the king, and places the latter on a precipice, from which the very breath of jealouſy may cauſe him to fall. There can be no rational objection to honourable diſtinctions; they are frequently conferred on individuals obſcure in birth, but who diſtinguiſh themſelves by various qualifications from the general maſs of people; there are alſo many men of bravery, of ſplendid talents, and liberal fortune, who are willing to hazard their lives, and employ their abilities, to the advantage of their country, and to

whom the honour of nobility is the only acceptable reward. We have many illuſtrious, legal, and military characters, many able negociators, who are comprehended under theſe deſcriptions. With reſpect to the former, Why ſhould the people be jealous of the diſtinctions conferred upon induſtrious merit? and as ſome reward is neceſſary for the ſoldier and the ſtateſman, if merely as a token of ſervice; we may behold them enjoy their honours, without making a large deduction from the *amor patriæ*.

It was a frequent complaint that titles of nobility were ſhamefully multiplied in France; then let the National Aſſembly erect a new and pure ſyſtem of titular diſtinction; let the king be permitted to beſtow titles of honour, but for life only, and with the approbation of the legiſlature; and let a reſtrictive power be veſted in the latter to exclude unworthy perſons from being thus diſtinguiſhed. By theſe regulations, nobility would be purified, merit properly rewarded, and the king would poſſeſs (without the faculty of perverting) a ſuperior degree of recommendatory patronage.

In

In the deſultory courſe of a letter, I have not been able to convey my thoughts with great perſpicuity of arrangement; this I am ſure you will have the goodneſs to excuſe, and I am equally certain that if but a ſingle remark is uſeful, it will not be unacceptable. I have freely, and I hope impartially, ſtated my ſentiments on the REVOLUTION, which, upon the whole, muſt be conſidered as a deſirable and glorious event. Much has been performed, and much doubtleſs will be effected, by the wiſdom of the National Aſſembly; that the vigilance of its members may defeat the enemies of liberty, and their ſkilful patriotiſm compoſe the agitation of France, is the ſincere wiſh of

Your's, &c.

********.

NEW

BRITISH MUSEUM